DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 699 CG 025 526

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TITLE A Framework for Quality Control, Accountability, and Evaluation: Being Clear about the Legitimate Outcomes of Career Counseling.
SPONS AGENCY Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Ottawa (Ontario).
PUB DATE Mar 94
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Symposium on Issues and Solutions for Evaluating Career Development (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, March 3-5, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Accountability; *Counseling; Counselor Attitudes; *Counselor Evaluation; *Counselor Performance; Counselor Role; Evaluation Methods; *Evaluation Needs; *Evaluation Utilization; Foreign Countries; *Outcomes of Treatment; Personnel Evaluation; Quality Control

ABSTRACT

This paper takes the position that shrinking resources and increasing accountability have forced counselors to reassess the role of evaluation. This new role should afford evaluation a higher priority so that it becomes as much a part of counseling as the interpersonal skills that currently form the bulk of counselor training programs. Some researchers suggest that an "evaluation culture" be adopted, in which demonstrated effectiveness, rather than counting input, becomes the central focus. Likewise, counselors' emphasis on systems approaches will require that the outcomes of counseling be viewed in terms of "system management" rather than as "transition from" the system. As more counselors adopt a systems perspective, the less realistic it becomes to evaluate counseling using the "post-transitional" measures which currently predominate. This will necessitate placing more emphasis on assessing the learning outcomes that lead to successful navigation through the system and then linking those learning outcomes to post-transition measures. These learning outcomes can be assessed locally and can also be tapped in ways that are technically simple and cost effective. This would allow for routine and unobtrusive assessments. Other valuative components, such as economic outcomes, provide a greater challenge since they are more difficult to judge from both a technical and a cost perspective. Contains nine references and three figures. (RJM)

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ED 381 699

A Framework For Quality Control, Accountability, And Evaluation: Being Clear About The Legitimate Outcomes of Career Counseling*

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* The author gratefully acknowledges support for the development of this paper from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council who funded the *Symposium on Issues and Solutions for Evaluating Career Development*, Halifax, Nova Scotia, March 3–5, 1994, for which this paper was prepared.

Running head: EVALUATION FRAMEWORKS

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Abstract

The current situation regarding evaluation and accountability issues in career and employment counselling and the background conditions giving rise to the current state of affairs form the basis for an evaluation model that can address both formative and summative evaluation concerns in career and employment counselling.

A Framework For Quality Control, Accountability, And Evaluation

The topic of evaluation in career and employment counselling circles is fraught with paradoxes and contradictions. Counsellors lament the fact that they are vulnerable in the face of growing accountability concerns, but do not see evaluation as a solution. A course in evaluation is an optional part of most counsellor training programs, however counsellors do very little evaluation in their jobs. Accountability is thought to be important, but few models exist for helping counsellors become more accountable. Most counsellors report receiving an annual performance appraisal, and that their work with clients is an important factor in that appraisal, however very little first hand observation of their work with clients is conducted. What is needed is an evaluation framework that is user friendly, has the potential for both formative and summative evaluation, and could be used by counsellors in trouble shooting their interactions with clients.

This paper will begin by describing the current state of affairs regarding evaluation and accountability issues in career and employment counselling, based on a recent survey of career and employment counselling in Canada (Conger, Hiebert, & Hong-Farrell, 1993). The paper then describes some of the background conditions giving rise to the current state of affairs. Finally, the focus shifts to an elaboration of one model for addressing evaluation and accountability concerns in career and employment counselling.

The Current Situation

Conger et al. (1993) found that very few counsellors conduct any formal evaluation of their work with clients. In some

sectors, 40% of counsellors reported never doing any evaluation. Less than one-quarter of the counsellors had any sort of form for assessing the impact of counselling on clients and less than one-fifth did any follow-up. About 35%–45% reported doing informal evaluations of their counselling in the session with the client, presumably by asking the client if the session was useful.

Conger et al. (1993) found that attempts at formative evaluation were likewise paltry. Few counsellors engage in any regular review of the programs they offer clients. When program review is conducted, clients are seldom consulted in the process. Counsellors do recognize that this presents a problem for they report feeling that the attention given to program review, evaluation, and improvement is not adequate. However, that recognition does not seem to provide sufficient incentive to change the current practice.

Paradoxically, most counsellors report receiving an annual performance appraisal. However, their work with clients does not appear to be central in their performance appraisal for counsellors report receiving very little supervision of their work with clients. When supervision is received, it appears to be on administrative matters, rather than a counsellor's work with clients. Still, 50%–65% of counsellors report that client feedback is one of the criteria that go into the performance appraisal, but it is not clear what the source of that client feedback is.

Continuing the series of paradoxes, counsellors report believing that they offer good service and that their clients are

satisfied. In fact, 33%–50% of the counsellors report that they think they offer very good or excellent service and 70%–87% think their service is as good as or better than the service offered by others. However, all counsellors are not sure that counselling is meeting their superiors' or funders' expectations, and only 50%–65% of them feel that their superiors really understand counselling. On the average counsellors believe that counselling satisfies abut 65%–85% of their superiors' expectations, but in some sectors 12% of counsellors report that counselling satisfied none of their superiors' expectations. Further, 18%–42% of the counsellors could not identify the extent to which their superiors' expectations were being met. Therefore, while counsellors report satisfaction with the work they do, they have little objective data to support their belief.

Background Factors Affecting Evaluation Issues

It is unfortunate that career and employment counselling have drifted from their roots in education (cf. Parsons, 1909) and become oriented towards a perspective where evaluating client change is problematic. Although most counsellor training includes some course work in assessment, often the focus is on intra-psychic factors (like personality or temperament), intra-individual factors (like personal interests or aptitudes), or on vague constructs (like vocational maturity). For years, even career exploration has been embedded in psychological tests, rather than individual self-awareness, per se. Usually, the results of such assessments are expressed in norm-referenced terms, rather than criterion-referenced, or individual terms.

This may indicate how a client compares to the rest of the population, but often does not provide the basis for determining client change or progress towards a counselling goal. This sort of focus in career and employment counselling makes assessing client change problematic, but in a very real sense, career and employment counsellors should not be blamed for this state of affairs, for they are victims of the training they received.

A second unfortunate circumstance in the development of career and employment counselling has been a pervasive focus on process to the exclusion of outcome. Those who need convincing of this claim might consider asking a group of counsellors or counsellor educators to list say five words that were associated with, or describe, counselling. Invariably, the list would contain almost exclusively process words. They would be terms such as: helping, relationship, facilitation, empowering, accepting, supporting, encouraging, and so on. Typically, there would be very few outcome words, like client change, problem resolution, or getting a job. Seeing counselling as solely, or even primarily, a process, and excluding outcome from being part of the conceptualization of counselling, makes it very difficult to give evaluation a high priority. Moreover, excluding outcome from the conceptualization of counselling likely is responsible for the prevailing view that assumes attempts to evaluate counselling invariably will be intrusive and will interfere with counselling (the counselling process).

A major tenet in this paper is that there is a need to build a framework that includes outcome and process as equal partners in

the counselling enterprise: Process without outcome is not counselling, any more than is outcome without process. To extend the argument, the belief underlying this paper is that it is important to build a framework for counselling that incorporates evaluation as a regular part of the counselling process, that centers evaluation in the client's experience (rather than the frame of reference of the counsellor or the test), and views outcomes and process as inextricably entwined, both being integral parts of what counselling is all about.

An Evaluation Framework

Any attempt to build a framework for the evaluation of career and employment counselling must begin by examining the question "What are the legitimate processes and outcomes of counselling?" Ideally, the answer to this question will result from negotiations between the various stakeholder groups involved: clients, counsellors, supervisors, managers, and funders. In these negotiations, counsellors need to make sure that the processes and outcomes so identified are "achievable" so that when the criteria for accountability are identified counsellors commit to a "deliverable" goal. This should involve discussions between supervisors, managers, funders, and counsellors to create a shared view of the legitimate processes and outcomes associated with counselling and to make sure that everyone's expectations pertain to a legitimate domain for counselling. Having reached agreement on legitimate domain and reasonable expectations, the focus can then shift to identifying the legitimate processes and outcomes associated with counselling.

Counselling Outcomes

Recently, some authors (e.g., Killeen, White, & Watts, 1993) have pointed out that although people often expect counselling to produce results that have a direct socio-economic the impact, the more legitimate outcomes of counselling are the learning outcomes. Killeen et al., (1993) claim that it is inappropriate to judge the success of counselling on factors over which counselling has no control. Instead, it is more appropriate to evaluate counselling on the learning outcomes which are the precursors of socio-economic change. Thus, when people learn the skills involved in overcoming employment barriers like finances, family conflict, and lack of support, counselling should be considered successful, even if the immediate result is not job placement. Similarly, when people learn self-management skills that have been shown to have a positive impact on motivation (e.g., setting realistic, achievable, and observable goals, self-monitoring progress towards those goals, reward oneself for goal-directed thoughts and actions, see Bandura 1977, 1980; Kanfer, 1980), counselling should be judged successful, because motivation (a precursor) can be shown to have a positive impact on job placement rates, job productivity, or other similar socio-economic variables.

In a similar vein, as counselling theory continues to embrace a systems perspective, counselling should adopt more of a "system management" role, focusing on "navigation through" the system, rather than "transition from" it (Killeen et al., 1993, p. 78). Thus, the interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and teamwork skills that are part of the *Employability Skills Profile,*

published recently by the Conference Board of Canada (1992) become legitimate outcomes for counselling because they have been identified by employers as skills important for job success and job satisfaction. The important point underlying this discussion is that we need to conceptualize the goals of counselling in terms of the legitimate outcomes that can be achieved by counsellors and clients working together.

Counselling Process

For some time now, counselling has been shackled by an over-reliance on the individual interview as the primary method of operating. The vast majority of clients seeking in career and employment counselling in Canada are serviced with individual interviews. Conger et al. (1993) found that upwards of 75% of clients are seen in individual counselling sessions. If the legitimate outcomes of counselling are seen as learning outcomes rather than intra-psychic or socio-economic, then it becomes appropriate to explore more diverse ways for servicing client needs.

The literature pertaining to individual and small group instruction and experiential learning contains many procedures that have an established track record of success. These methods include: coaching, skill practice (complete with feedback), skill modeling, home work, group discussion, workshops, and didactic instruction, all of which should be considered as part of the counselling process. (It is important to note that while some of the above concepts are present in the counselling literature, e.g., homework, they typically are not considered an integral part

of counselling. To illustrate, methods for determining, assigning, monitoring, and revising homework are not included in the skill training that counsellors receive.) Very few people are "talked into" achieving learning outcomes. What is more typically successful is a variety input, based on the learner's needs, relevant to the learner's frame of reference, graduated and sequenced so that the learner can master the various learning components, and embedded in a total learning experience that will help learners integrate the new knowledge, skills, and attitudes into their existing experiential framework.

A Model For Evaluation

Figure 1 presents one possible framework for approaching the evaluation of career and employment counselling that incorporates the suggestions given above. In Figure 1, process and outcome are seen as equal partners in the counselling enterprise. Counselling process has two primary components, namely what the counsellor is doing and what the client is doing. Ideally, counsellor action will be guided by client factors such as: client goals, preferred ways of operating, and past experience. Counsellor actions in turn will influence client responding and the counsellor will adjust his or her subsequent actions based on those client responses. Thus counsellor and client process are seen as intertwined in a reciprocal relationship. Ideally, counsellor and client processes will complement one another, but in order to evaluate the processes leading to counselling outcomes, evaluation procedures need to allow for the differential effects of counsellor and client actions.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

When counselling is successful, counsellor and client processes will lead to client learning outcomes, i.e., changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc. Those learning outcomes in turn will impact such things as motivation, self-awareness, capacity for self-direction, personal agency, and other precursors of more global change, or on socio-economic variables directly, or on aspects of the client presenting problem.

The model presented in Figure 1 can be used for both formative and summative evaluation and as a guide for trouble shooting problems that arise. For example, if the socio-economic outcomes are not achieved or if there is inadequate change in the client presenting problem, it becomes appropriate to examine whether or not the learning outcomes have been achieved. If adequate client learning did not occur, then it is important to examine whether the counsellor implemented the intervention in an appropriate manner and how closely the client followed the intervention plan.

To illustrate how the components in the model are inter-related, consider the example of a client who attends a Job Finding Club and does not find a job. In order to trouble shoot the reasons for this unexpected result, it is important to have evidence pertaining to each component in the model. Regarding skill acquisition, if the client skill levels are high then as long as the client stays motivated to use the skills a job offer likely will follow.

On the other hand, low client skill levels across the skill domains addressed in the Job Finding Club could explain why there was no job offer. If it appears that very little client learning occurred, then it is important to examine the process variables. If the client was not engaged in the program, it is no surprise that little learning resulted and consequently, little change in the presenting problem. In such cases, the counsellor would need to find ways to make the intervention more engaging or meaningful to the client so that a higher degree of compliance to the intervention could be obtained. On the other hand, if the client followed the program but still did not achieve sufficient skill mastery, they perhaps more practice is necessary or perhaps a different program, more suited to the client's style or past experience, is warranted.

Counsellor fidelity to the intervention also is important when trouble shooting an unanticipated result. Continuing with the example from the Job Finding Club, it may be that the counsellor was not following standard Job Finding Club procedures, which would explain the unsuccessful result. For example, if the counsellor was primarily lecturing group members, of if the focus was primarily discussion rather than modeling, skill practice, and positive reinforcement, then little client skill acquisition would be expected. It is only when the counsellor follows a reasonable approximation of the intervention that we can expect the result typically associated with that intervention.

A key factor in this evaluation model is the explicit linking of process and outcome. Further research will be needed to make

explicit the link between learning outcomes, precursors, and socio-economic outcomes, but a few examples can already be provided. One example mentioned earlier is the connection between basic self-management skills (e.g., goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement), motivation, and job search behaviour. Another example is provided by the relationship between learning relaxation (skill), reducing stress (precursor), and success in job interviews (socio-economic). Killeen et al. (1993) point out that assessing learning outcomes is technically simple and quite cost effective. However, they admit that the economic outcomes are more difficult to evaluate, from both a technical and cost perspective. Therefore, once the link between learning and economic outcomes is established, the learning outcomes can be routinely evaluated, likely at a local level, while the economic outcomes may be evaluated less frequently and perhaps on a larger scale.

Evaluation Methods

One characteristic inherent in this model will be a far greater role for informal evaluation procedures. In the past, formal standardized assessment techniques have predominated in career and employment counselling circles, while informal methods have been disparaged. However, the rich heritage of informal and practitioner generated evaluation procedures, that have been part and parcel of other learning environments e.g., schools, will be invaluable to draw on when developing methods for monitoring (and evaluating) counsellor and client process and for assessing learning outcomes and precursors. These methods will include

simple check lists of things such as: client home work completion, number of job interviews attended, level of subjective stress during an interview, motivation swings during the day. (See Figures 2 for examples.) They also might include specially designed client progress forms that document referral criteria and summarize and tabulate client progress towards counselling goals. (See Figure 3.)

Insert Figures 2 and 3 About Here

The recent descriptions of performance assessments in the education literature (cf. Wolf, Bixby, Glenn, & Gardner, 1991) have applicability to counselling interactions. Using performance assessments involves using the same activities that are part of skill training in the assessment of skill mastery, thus ensuring that assessment involves a meaningful task that is not intrusive to the learning environment. Such procedures show great promise for evaluating client learning outcomes in counselling.

Increasingly, some organizations are finding that they are not able to meet the total array of client needs and are beginning to "contract out" services to smaller, more specialized agencies. However, often it is difficult to predict the success of such referrals and to monitor how well the contracted agency is filling the referring organization's expectations. The check lists provided in a recently published *Quality Service Workbook* (Riddle, 1994) provide an example of how organizations can systematically

approach the selection and evaluation of referral sources or examine their own quality assurance practices.

Such informal assessment and monitoring procedures are relatively easy to use, unobtrusive, and do not detract appreciably from counselling process. They offer great potential for making more explicit the nature of the legitimate outcomes of counselling and for establishing the links between those outcomes and the "hard data results" that most planners and funders currently are enamored with.

Summary

The main argument in this paper is that for counselling to survive in times of reducing resources and increasing accountability, an new approach for the role of evaluation needs to be developed. This new approach will need to place evaluation as a high priority in the counselling endeavour. Evaluation will need to become as much a part of counselling as the interpersonal skills that form the bulk of counsellor training programs.

Killeen et al. (1993) see a need to develop an "evaluation culture", where evaluation becomes a routine feature of counselling practice. The focus in this evaluation culture will need to be on demonstrating effectiveness, rather than counting inputs, or even counting outcomes that may or may not be related to the inputs or the counselling process. From this perspective, the focus becomes one of demonstrating effectiveness, rather than user reports of general satisfaction.

With the emphasis in counselling on systems approaches, there will be an increasing need to view the outcomes of counselling in

terms of "system management" rather than "transition from" the system. The more counselling adopts a systems perspective, the less realistic it is to evaluate it in terms of "post-transitional" measures. Thus, there will be a greater emphasis on assessing the learning outcomes that lead to successful navigation through the system and linking those learning outcomes to the post-transition measures that currently predominate the evaluation field.

It was mentioned earlier that the learning outcomes of counselling can be assessed locally and can be tapped in a way that is technically simple and cost effective. This would allow for their assessment in a routine and unobtrusive manner. The economic outcomes provide a greater challenge for they are more difficult from both a technical and cost perspective. Therefore, the development of economic assessments, and the establishment of the links between the learning outcomes and the economic outcomes, likely is the job of national action bodies and large research studies. The potential pay off, to both the profession and the clients it serves, is well worth the effort.

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Figure Caption

Figure 1. A Model For Evaluating Career Counselling

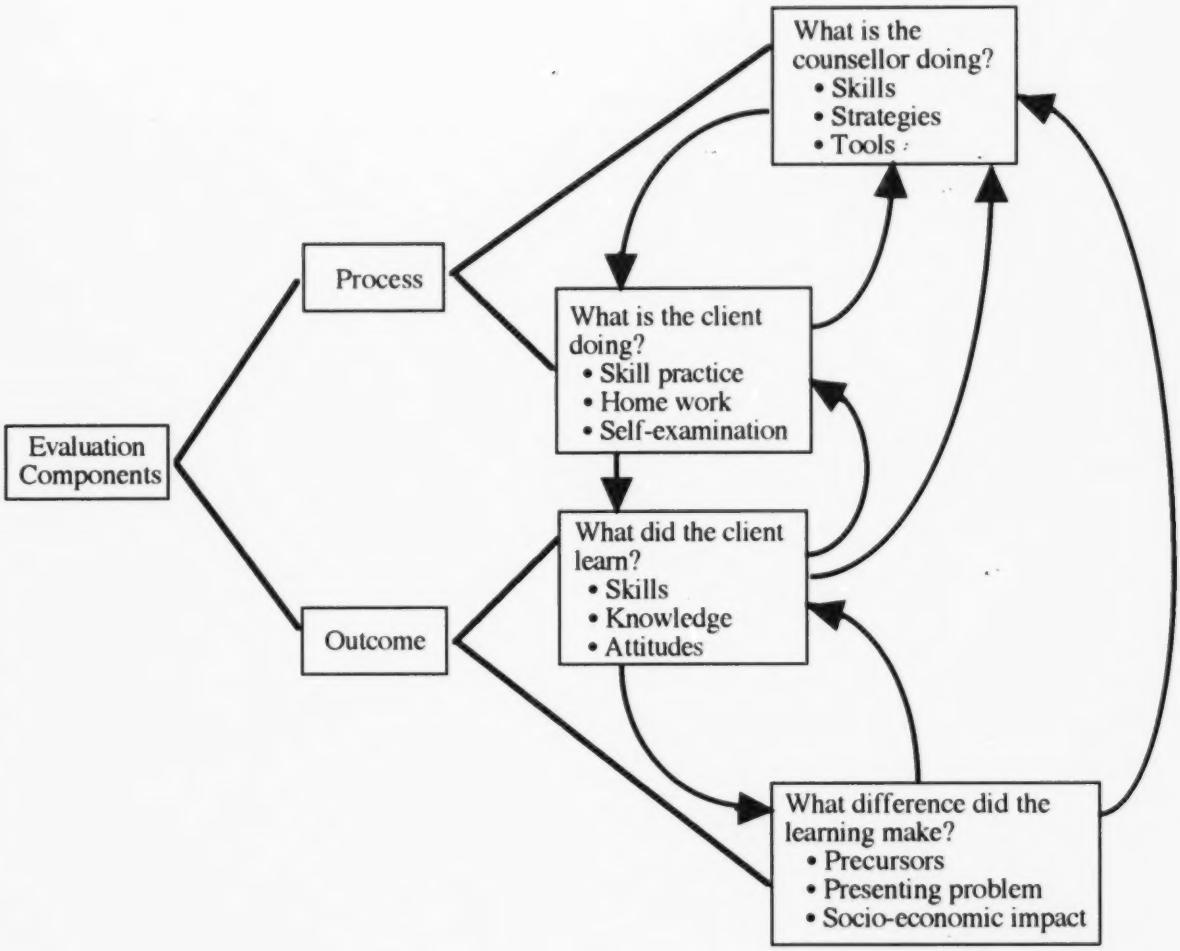
Evaluation Components
Process
Outcome
What is the counsellor doing?
• Skills
• Strategies
• Tools
What is the client doing?
• Skill practice
• Home work
• Self-examination
What did the client learn?
• Skills
• Knowledge
• Attitudes
What difference did the learning make?
• Precursors
• Presenting problem
• Socio-economic impact

Figure Caption

Figure 2. Sample Checklist For Monitoring Client Process

Job Interview Skills Practice Log Sheet

Use the following form to keep track of the job interviews you have attended.

Use the following scales to chart your reactions.

Interviewer rating	1=rotten 2=OK 3=really friendly
Your skills	1=terrible 2=not too good 3=OK 4=mostly good 5=excellent
How you felt the interview went	1=terrible·····5=OK·····10=great

Date	Interviewer Name	Interviewer rating	My skills	How I felt

Level of Motivation

Place a mark on the chart below to show how motivated you feel to look for work.
Use the five-scale below.

5	=	very motivated-it's the most important thing for me to do today
4	=	very motivated, but something might come up to interfere
3	=	quite a bit motivated, I think I will end up looking for some leads
2	=	I sort of care and I might get around to looking for work today
1	=	If I run out of other things to do, I'll try looking for some leads
0	=	I couldn't care less if I ever looked for work

5																							
4																							
3																							
2																							
1																							
0																							
	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	01	02	03	04	05

Figure Caption

Figure 3. Sample Checklist For Monitoring Client Outcomes

Group Job Finding Club: Client Tracking Check List (to be completed for each participant)

Referral Criteria	Criteria met Y	?	N	Contractor Expectations	Expectations for Client	Evaluation
wants full time employment				Return 1 copy of this report	**Client Process**	
can handle work in groups				for each client to the project	Attendance	
receptive to structured approach				manager as part of the 1 month follow-up report	Network Telephone Practice	
English competency				**Client Process**	Resumé	
emotionally stable				**refers to how well the worker engaged in the training process for each element**	Video interview practice	
medical condition stable					Application Forms	
not booked for surgery					Cover Letter	
no medical investigation					Job Leads	
no medication interference					Job Offer Evaluation Form	
not in active appeal process				**Client Skills**	**Client Skills**	
no full time school scheduled within 4 mo				**refers to how well the client mastered the skills taught in the Job Finding Club**	Telephone skills • Network calls	
no substance abuse					• job leads	
not emotionally challenged					Informational interview skills	
Case Mgr approval (if previously enrolled in JFC)					Job interview skills	
				Client Outcomes	**Client Outcomes**	
				refers to the products that workers produce during the Job Finding Club	Network chart	
presession completed					calling cards	
has defused anger, is ready to proceed					Sample application forms	
has identified transferable skills				**These should be part of each client's file**	Resumé	
has clear job objective					Cover letter	
commit to 5-6 hrs/day, 3 wks					Job offer	
					Job accepted	N Y

In evaluating the outcomes, please use a two-step process.
(A) decide on whether the outcome is **acceptable** or **unacceptable**, then
(B) assign the appropriate rating:

(1) if the outcome is just terrible,
(2) if the outcome really is not acceptable, but almost there,
(3) if the outcome is barely acceptable (but still OK otherwise it would be 1 or 2),
(5) if the outcome is outstanding, and
(4) if it is somewhere between minimally acceptable and outstanding.

Graphically, the scale looks like this: → → → → → → → → → →